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AUTHOR Martinez, Margaret Perea
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ABSTRACT

In accordance with the Albuquerque (New Mexico) Public Schools' curriculum planning process, a language arts program evaluation was conducted during the 1986-87 school year in order: (1) to provide a comprehensive overview of the language arts program; (2) to determine if the language arts program meets the needs of students and parents; and (3) to provide information for continued program development and improvement. Opinion surveys were collected from parents, students, English teachers from all levels, and high school drama teachers. Despite parents' requests for a greater emphasis on writing and teachers' desire for more training in developing creative and critical thinking skills, in general, findings indicated that the language arts program is meeting the needs of parents and students and effectively meeting the goals of the program. An analysis of scores on the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills showed that the Albuquerque students were at or above the national average in all subjects related to language arts, with spelling being the weakest performance area of students. Student opinion surveys at all levels revealed a positive attitude toward writing, with an indication that writing process activities were becoming more widespread. Additionally, drama teachers reported that they would prefer to have funding allocated directly to drama departments. (Twenty-four references are attached.) (ARH)

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LANGUAGE ARTS

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PROGRAM EVALUATION

- 1987 -

CS211057

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Prepared by:

MARGARET PEREA MARTINEZ
Program Evaluation Specialist

Special thanks to:
Dée Foster, Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator
Charles Serns, Core Subjects Supervisor

Thanks also to the elementary teacher advisory committee, the middle school language arts content leaders, the high school English department chairpersons, the high school drama teachers, and all those who responded to the surveys for their contributions of time and expertise.

FALL, 1987

LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM EVALUATION

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ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

The Language Arts Program evaluation was conducted during the 1986-87 school year in accordance with the Albuquerque Public Schools Six Year Curriculum Planning Process. The major objectives of the evaluation were to provide a comprehensive overview of the language arts program, to determine if the language arts program meets the needs of students and parents, and to provide information appropriate for continued program development and improvement. It is important to note that although reading is one of the language arts, the reading program is evaluated separately in 1988-89 in accordance with the Curriculum Planning Process.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A total sample of 1,293 parents were mailed opinion surveys; responses were received from 17%. Opinion survey results were compiled for 3,031 elementary and secondary students and 216 advanced drama students. Opinion surveys were returned by 60% of the elementary teachers surveyed, 67% of middle school language arts teachers, 45% of high school English teachers and 91% of the high school drama teachers. Responses were received from 50% of the elementary and 58% of the secondary school administrators.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Data and content analysis presented throughout this evaluation reveal that the language arts program is meeting the needs of parents and students and effectively meeting the goals of the program. Analysis disclosed concerns related to several aspects of the language arts program. Teachers expressed the need for inservice to develop creative and critical thinking skill units and for articulation between grades, levels, and schools. Parents requested that more emphasis be given to writing skills throughout the language arts curriculum.

A three year longitudinal analysis of Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills scores demonstrated that students score at or above the national average in all subtests related to language arts. The data also revealed that, the Spelling subtest, while well within the normal range, remains the weakest performance area of students. A two year longitudinal study of the 1984-85 and 1985-86 Writing Appraisal portion of the New Mexico High School Proficiency Examination demonstrated that 94-95% of the students had passed the test.

Student opinion surveys administered at the elementary, middle, and high school levels revealed that students demonstrated positive attitudes toward writing. Responses indicated that a growing number of students are being asked to perform various types of writing process activities; however, the data indicated that such instruction is not routine. APS students reported receiving more written suggestions from their teachers on how to improve their writing than did students in a comparative national sample.

Drama teachers indicated that they would prefer to have funding allocated directly to the drama departments at each school so as to diminish their present dependence on ticket sales and fund-raising projects for the money necessary to purchase needed equipment.

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The Albuquerque Public Schools Six Year Curriculum Planning Process (K-12) was instituted in 1983 and follows the New Mexico Department of Education textbook adoption cycle. The APS Curriculum Planning Process and the state's textbook adoption cycle are synchronized so that a framework for planned curriculum change as well as equitable division of resources can be provided.

The Six Year Curriculum Planning Process includes the pre-adoption year, textbook adoption year, two implementation years, maintenance year, and program evaluation year. The core of the Curriculum Planning Process is the evaluation year, which assures that each major content area is evaluated every six years. Four themes are examined in the curriculum evaluations: goals, content, teaching materials and strategies, and effectiveness including student achievement data.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of the 1986-87 K-12 language arts program evaluation were:

1. to provide a comprehensive overview of the K-12 language arts program;

2. to determine if the language arts program meets the needs of students and parents;

3. to determine how teachers and administrators view the effectiveness of the language arts program, especially in terms of goals, content, methods, and materials; and

4. to provide information appropriate for continued program development and improvement.

TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL INPUT

An elementary teacher advisory committee, the middle school language arts team leaders, the high school English department chairpersons, and the high school drama teachers met early in the year in individual groups to review the evaluation design and to provide input concerning specific evaluation questions pertinent to language arts goals, content, teaching methodologies, and materials specific to their grade levels. Principals also met to review the evaluation design and to provide input regarding the principals' survey instruments. Language arts teachers met again during the summer to provide feedback regarding survey results.

The Core Subjects Supervisor, Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator and resource teachers, as well as the Program Evaluator assigned to the evaluation of the language arts program, met with the teacher and principal groups.

DEVELOPMENT OF EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

The evaluation design, sampling plan, surveys, and related documentation were developed by the program evaluator and reviewed with elementary, middle, high school, and drama teacher committees, principals, the Core Subjects Supervisor, Language Arts Coordinator and resource teachers. All survey drafts were modified as necessary to ensure content validity and instructional appropriateness.

Related studies and articles were collected from a variety of sources by the Program Evaluator and the Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator. The section entitled, "Language Arts in APS," and much of the literature review was written by the Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator for inclusion in this evaluation report, and edited by the Program Evaluator to assure stylistic compatibility.

LIMITATIONS

The challenge of providing a comprehensive and accurate program evaluation was in developing the evaluation design and instruments in a manner that would ensure that results could be generalized to reflect pertinent issues concerning language arts in the Albuquerque Public Schools. Since information from parents, teachers, and administrators was to be obtained from opinion surveys, it was necessary to gain a perspective of the various components of the language arts program by involving language arts personnel and teachers at the onset of the evaluation process. All surveys were developed to gather data on issues related to the specific populations being surveyed. Respondents were encouraged to add their own comments and to expand on items included in the surveys. All responses were analyzed and are included in appropriate sections of this report.

In order to provide results that were representative of the various populations reflected in the K-12 language arts program, stratified random sampling techniques were utilized where appropriate. The sampling plan included students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Since the number of language arts teachers was limited enough to be manageable, all language arts teachers were given the opportunity to respond to opinion surveys. Students at the fourth, eighth, and eleventh grades were randomly selected to complete student opinion surveys.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Information required to address the Language Arts evaluation issues was derived from the following major sources:

Parent Opinion Surveys - A total of 1,293 randomly selected parents were mailed opinion surveys, including 380 parents of elementary students; 375 parents of middle school students; 377 parents of high school students; and 161 parents of high school students enrolled in Drama II. Responses were received from 17% of all parents surveyed.

Student Opinion Surveys - Opinion survey results were compiled for 3,031 students, including 1,823 elementary students, 695 secondary students, and 216 advanced high school drama students.

Student Assessments - A three year longitudinal study of 1985, 1986, and 1987 Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) results for third, fifth, and eighth grade students was analyzed. Special focus was given to CTBS Language Mechanics, Language Expression, Spelling, and Reference Skills subtest data. A two year longitudinal report of the 1985 and 1986 New Mexico High School Proficiency Exam (NMHSPE) Writing Skills Appraisal results for tenth grade students was included. In addition, the discussion on the NMHSPE Writing Skills Appraisal also includes an analysis of the scores earned on each of the required tasks.

Teacher Surveys - Opinion surveys were returned by 181 (60%) of the elementary teachers surveyed; 130 (67%) of the middle school language arts teachers; 112 (45%) of the high school English teachers; and 10 (91%) of the high school drama teachers.

Principals and Assistant Principals - Responses were received from 42 (50%) of the elementary school administrators and 39 (58%) of the secondary school administrators.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

At the national level a debate is on-going about the language arts curriculum. Some advocates following E.D. Hirsch Jr. believe that we must require students to learn a body of knowledge. Hirsch contends that "schools have concentrated on developing skills at the expense of ensuring a broader 'cultural literacy'." Wayne C. Booth, distinguished service professor of English at the University of Chicago, said, "Nobody doubts students have to have the kind of thing Hirsch is talking about in order to be able to read. How you get there is the question." (Rothman, 1987) While research and educational theory take us toward child-centered, individualized learning, toward concepts instead of facts and skills, and toward process instead of product, legislative bodies take us toward accountability and competency testing. This review considers the major areas of language arts instruction K-12, with particular attention to current knowledge in the teaching of literature, writing, handwriting, and spelling.

At the same time that we consider current knowledge about teaching, we must comply with state and national trends in testing. United States Secretary of Education, William J. Bennett, stated, "We will try to get our programs at the federal level to focus on accountability and try to urge actions at the state and local level to have more accountability." (Miller, 1987) In New Mexico, the Education Reform Act of 1986 imposed four new state-mandated tests in reading and language arts. This means that as of the 1987-88 school year, students in APS will be tested in reading and/or language arts in grades 1-8 and at grade 10.

Even as this evaluation report is being prepared, the teaching of language arts is changing. In July, 1987, a three-week summit meeting of teachers of English was held. (Rothman, 1987) Preceded by five years of planning, the conference was sponsored by a coalition of groups that includes the National Council of Teachers of English, the Modern Language Association, the Association of Departments of English, the College English Association, the College Language Association, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the Conference on English Education, and the Conference for Secondary School English Department Chairpersons. The conference participants came to the consensus that "the type of English instruction practiced in most schools, in which teachers aim to impart a body of knowledge to students, is outmoded."

WRITING

A summary report of recent research about the teaching of writing states that the best way to teach writing is through a process including four basic steps: (1) pre-writing (2) composing (3) revising and (4) editing. (Bennett, 1986). To use this process with students, teachers need to "coach" writing. This means actually eliciting students' thoughts and ideas and discussing how to express them.

The teaching strategy of discussing writing with students is often called "writing conferences." Writing conferences take only a few minutes per child. In elementary classrooms where teachers meet the same 30 students throughout the day, this strategy has the best opportunity for success. In middle and high school classrooms where teachers meet as many as 160 students per day in required classes, time for writing conferences becomes more difficult to schedule without disrupting on-going instruction.

In 1979, the National Council of Teachers of English published a position paper recommending a total teaching load of 100 students per teacher for secondary English classes in which the teaching of writing occurs. In agreement with current findings about the teaching of grammar and usage, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) at the 75th Annual Convention in Philadelphia in November, 1985, approved the following resolution:

> ON GRAMMAR EXERCISES TO TEACH SPEAKING AND WRITING: RESOLVED, that the National Council of Teachers of English affirm the position that the use of isolated grammar and usage exercises not supported by theory and research is a deterrent to the improvement of students' speaking and writing and that, in order to improve both of these, class time at all levels must be devoted to opportunities for meaningful listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and that NCTE urge the discontinuance of testing practices that encourage the teaching of grammar rather than English language arts instruction.

The intent of this resolution was not to discontinue the teaching of grammar. It does imply that teaching grammar alone is not justifiable, that grammar is a part of speaking and writing, and that language arts includes reading, writing, speaking, listening, and studying. Teachers of language arts/reading should include all areas of language arts in their planning.

Teaching writing as a process with four or five basic steps, and requiring students to write frequently, may be insufficient to bring about significant improvements in writing performance. A ten-year study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicates:

> To move beyond the current levels of achievement, a more systematic program of instruction may be needed; one focused more directly on the variety of different kinds of writing students need to learn to do and spanning a wider range of levels of complexity. (Applebee, 1984)

HANDWRITING

The teaching of handwriting has been simplified by a system advertised as "the fastest growing handwriting program in the nation." D'Nealian handwriting was introduced in 1978. Instead of the traditional "ball and stick" method, this system saves the students time by using a lower case alphabet in which the letters are formed in the same way in both manuscript and cursive writing. (World Book Encyclopedia, 1987) This D'Nealian method and the Zaner-Bloser, which is the traditional method, were both adopted by the Albuquerque Public Schools for use in the elementary schools in the language arts textbook adoption of 1981-82.

The New Mexico State Department of Education has developed competencies in language arts which include the following: Students will "produce materials in a legible form." APS First Grade Expected Competencies specifies that students will "write the capital letters and lower case letters of the alphabet in manuscript." APS Third Grade Expected Competencies states that students will "write the cursive alphabet." The World Book Encyclopedia goes further, stating, "Just being able to write is not enough. A person must also write legibly, so the words can be read. Handwriting that no one can read is useless and can cause serious problems."

Handwriting skills have become increasingly important in the past year because, as of the 1987-88 school year, students in the fourth and sixth grades are required to participate in a state-mandated writing appraisal. Students complete the writing tests in their own handwriting, making legibility of primary importance.

SPELLING

Recent research in spelling suggests that spelling is a developmental process. (Temple, 1982). Very young children begin to scribble, then as they relate sounds to letters, they begin to use consonants and to combine letters. In the next stage children begin to invent spelling, and finally, with more knowledge of written language, the child transfers to more standard spelling. This transfer to standard spelling usually begins within grades three and four. The research indicates that teachers should stimulate the development of student responsibility for correct spelling.

An analysis of compositions of 22,650 students in grades 2-12 was conducted to determine the types and frequency of words that students use spontaneously. (Templeton, 1986) The research showed that the basic core of high frequency words is the same as has been observed over the years, beginning with Horn (1926), Gates (1937), Rinsland (1945), Green (1954), Harris and Jacobson (1972), and Jacobson (1985). Such information enables us to select the appropriate words for inclusion in a formal spelling program and to present these words at developmentally appropriate stages. "Highlights of Research on the Learning and Teaching of Spelling," reported in Educational Leadership (1986), concluded:

- Learning how to spell follows a developmental progression.
- Learning how to spell is primarily a conceptual process rather than a rote memorization process.
- Words selected for study should reflect students' levels of conceptual understanding of words as well as the frequency of the words and word patterns.
- Learning how to spell depends on interaction with the other language arts of reading, writing, and vocabulary development.

LITERATURE

A recent study called Literacy: Profiles of America's Young Adults (Kirsch and Jungeblut, 1986) showed that 95% of young adults tested reach or exceed the average reading proficiency level of fourth grade students. Eighty percent reach or exceed the average reading proficiency of eleventh grade students. The study concluded the "illiteracy" is not a major problem for the young adult population. (Cunningham, 1987)

> Still our present lack of agreement on the kind of literacy experience important to young people coupled with the failure of all of the major national school reform reports (save for Mortimore Adler's) to mention literature as important in quality education signals a present dilemma. And the absence, until very recently, of serious attention to the content and teaching of literature in our professional journals, professional conferences, and state assessment efforts reflects widespread confusion over purpose." (Squire, 1985)

Experiences with good literature provide children with excellent language models for listening, speaking, reading, and writing and so combine all of the language arts skills. Such experiences introduce children to significant ideas, literary forms, vocabulary, and "memorable" language otherwise missed. Literature is a vehicle through which cultural heritage is transmitted.

A trend in elementary language arts education is the viewing of reading and writing as a connected process. Individual learning styles and individual development are taken into consideration. Focusing children's interests upon the integration of oral language, writing, and listening with reading is favored over isolated reading skill development. "For optimal learning teachers should involve children actively in many meaningful functional language experiences, including speaking, listening, writing, and reading." (Association for Childhood Education International, et al.) Literature helps to provide such experiences.

At the secondary level, literary works must provide a heritage of cultural literacy and, also, provide a forum for student response. The school population has an increasing proportion of disadvantaged and minority background students, a strong influence of television and other non-literary media, and a growing need for higher order thinking skills. A list of literary works must include many forms of literature to meet the changing needs of students. This national trend is demonstrated in the choice of materials recommended in APS high school English course outlines.

SUMMARY

Considering the current knowledge about the teaching and the integration of language arts strands, Albuquerque Public Schools has moved in the direction of:

- teaching literature using a shared inquiry discussion to elicit reader response to literature and integrating the writing process.
- teaching writing as a process with specific instruction in grammar, usage, mechanics, and punctuation integrated into the process.
- teaching handwriting in a consistent, sequential program within all elementary schools.
- emphasizing the structural analysis of commonly used words in a sequential spelling program, teaching spelling generalizations, and practicing auditory and visual memory techniques.

LANGUAGE ARTS IN THE ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In the Albuquerque Public Schools language arts instruction is defined in a written curriculum based upon competencies published by the State Department of Education. The competencies include five areas: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and studying skills. In APS the competencies for grades K-8 have been published at each grade level. The State Department of Education exit competencies define minimal competencies for high school graduation.

State-mandated tests include the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills which is administered to third, fifth, and eighth grade students and includes subtests related to language arts. The State Department of Education also requires that students at the tenth grade successfully complete the New Mexico High School Proficiency Exam (see note, p. 34), which includes an objective portion and a writing appraisal. In addition to preparing students for these tests, teachers of language arts in the APS district strive to prepare students to meet the broader goals of education in a democratic society, to speak effectively, to listen and view critically, and to appreciate their rich heritage of language and culture. These are skills that are used most and tested the least, if at all.

From kindergarten through the fifth grade, language arts skills include reading, writing, speaking, listening, spelling, handwriting, and study skills, and are taught in an integrated fashion by the classroom teacher. State law currently requires that students receive three hours of language arts instruction per day at grades one and two, two and one-half hours at grade three, and ten hours per week in grades four and five. Two classes of language arts skills are required in the sixth grade. Middle schools are required to provide English instruction for all seventh and eighth grade students.

The middle school language arts program specifies the teaching of skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and spelling. Formal instruction in handwriting at the middle school level is given only as needed to remediate. Language arts classes are two periods per day for sixth grade students. In many cases the two periods are scheduled as a block and are taught by one teacher. Seventh and eighth grade classes are structured in a similar fashion for most students.

At the high school level, the language arts program is called English. The credit that students receive in high school is designated as required English credit. For students who entered ninth grade prior to September, 1986, four units of English are required for graduation. For students who entered ninth grade after September, 1986, four units of English and one unit of communication skills are required. The high school program offers English 9, 10, 11, and 12 at four levels of instruction: developmental, regular, enriched, and honors. Additional elective courses are offered in literature, writing, speech, journalism and drama.

Language arts programs are required every year for every student. Thus, the program serves the district's 79,000 students on a daily basis in addition to the 9,500 students that choose language arts electives in middle and high school, and the 7,000 tenth grade students taking communication skills as a requirement beginning in September 1987.

GOALS, CURRICULUM GUIDES, AND COURSE CONTENTS

The APS elementary and middle school language arts programs share common goals. Teachers at both levels were asked to rate how effectively they believe the goals of the program were being accomplished. The table below demonstrates that the majority of teachers were in agreement that their respective programs effectively accomplish their goals.

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE APS LANGUAGE ARTS GOALS

	Percentage of Teachers	
	Elementary	Middle
To encourage and expand the language of the students so that they effectively communicate.	95%	95%
To provide students with quality literature experiences which expand their knowledge of print.	88	75
To provide students with quality literature experiences which expand their vocabulary and their language.	84	79
To provide students with quality experiences which expand their conceptualization of their world and the world of others.	74	71
To involve students in meaningful writing experiences which foster growth in writing for various purposes and audiences.	83	82
To develop the students' creative and critical thinking skills.	78	71
To enrich and expand students' lives by helping them discover the pleasures of being writers and readers.	81	78

Teachers at both the elementary and middle school levels were in agreement that the goals need to be rewritten to define the relationship between reading and literature within the language arts curriculum. Approximately one-fourth of the teachers expressed the opinion that the goal to develop a student's creative and critical thinking skills was not effectively accomplished at either the elementary or middle school level. Teachers expressed the need for inservice related to creative and critical thinking activities and materials in all areas of language arts.

Parents of elementary and middle school students were also asked to gauge the effectiveness of the language arts program. The data revealed that while the majority of parents were of the opinion that the program was accomplishing its goals, parents of middle school students did not rate the effectiveness of the program as highly as did parents of elementary students. Parents repeatedly requested that more emphasis be placed on writing skills in the elementary and middle school language arts curriculum.

English teachers at the high school were also asked to rate the effective accomplishment of their stated goals. The data presented on the following table reveal that the majority of high school teachers agreed that the goals of their program are being accomplished.

The goal rated by high school English teachers as least effectively accomplished states that students will be able to write for a variety of audiences. Teachers indicated that the emphasis for high school students is on writing essays and formal compositions and, therefore, students are limited to the teachers as their intended audience. Over one-third of the high school English teachers rated the goals dealing with listening skills as ineffectively accomplished. Teachers related that time limitations and class size inhibit them from devoting much instructional time to student presentations and interpretations and discussions.

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE APS LANGUAGE ARTS GOALS

	Percentage of Teachers
To read with understanding and appreciation, a range of literature rich in quality and representative of different literary forms and various cultures.	89%
To write sentences and paragraphs using standard grammatical construction, spelling, and mechanics.	84
To produce materials in a legible form.	79
To use effective study strategies.	77
To write in the appropriate mode for a variety of purposes.	77
To select appropriate sources of information for a specific purpose.	75
To organize material for studying by classifying, notetaking, outlining, summarizing, and synthesizing.	70
To use speaking as a process of communication.	69
To be able to receive and interpret verbal and nonverbal messages and respond with understanding by using active listening techniques.	67
To understand and appreciate a range of aural presentations.	64
To write for a variety of audiences.	60

The majority of parents of high school students agreed that the goals of the program are being effectively accomplished. The only notable exception is that of students being able to "write for a variety of audiences," where three-fourths of the parents believe that the language arts program does not require adequate writing instruction. Many parents offered comments that the program should emphasize the development of writing skills including essays, research papers, creative writing, and term papers. Parents repeatedly stated that students are not required to do enough writing.

The majority of high school teachers commented that the high pupil/teacher ratio does not allow adequate time to grade what they consider to be a sufficient quantity of writing assignments. The current staffing formula for language arts teachers in grades six through eight is a teacher/pupil ratio of 1 to 155 and for grades nine through twelve, 1 to 150. Many of the respondents endorsed the recommendations of the National Council of Teachers of English as stated in the position paper, "Workload and the Teaching of Secondary School English," which states:

> For a teacher load of 100 students, a minimum of 20 minutes per week per student for the evaluation of writing involves 33.3 hours, the equivalent of four working days -- in addition to the time required for the preparation and teaching of other language arts skills. Therefore, the National Council of Teachers of English calls for a teacher workload of not more than 100 students (per day).

The Educational Reform Act of 1986 (Senate Bill 106) includes provisions requiring a pupil/teacher ratio of 1:135 for grades six through eight with a maximum of 27 students per class. The Reform Act also requires that while the high school pupil/teacher ratio is to remain the same (1 to 150), a teacher would be given no more than 30 students per class. These requirements will be effective as of the 1988-89 school year. While not the most ideal situation, changes in class load indicated in the new legislation could greatly alleviate the problem of overloading teachers, which may provide teachers with more time to work with students and to encourage more student writing.

Elementary, middle, and high school principals and assistant principals were also asked to determine the extent to which they consider the goals of the language arts program are being accomplished. The majority of school administrators responded that the goals of the program are being effectively accomplished. A greater majority of principals rated the goals effectively accomplished than did either elementary, middle, or high school teachers. Worthy of attention is that one-fourth of both the elementary and secondary principals conceded that the language arts program ineffectively supports teaching effective study strategies. Their assessment concurs with the perception of the high school teachers.

CURRICULUM AND COURSE CONTENT

Curriculum documents were developed by teacher committees in 1981 as part of the last language arts textbook adoption. Ninety-three percent of the elementary teachers reported familiarity with the Literacy Reading/Language Arts Curriculum Guide and 95% were very familiar with the Expected Competencies in language arts at their grade levels.

Whereas 53% of those who teach language arts at grades 6, 7, or 8 reported being very familiar with the Middle School Language Arts Curriculum Guide, 23% of the teachers who teach classes that combine those grade levels reported being very familiar with the curriculum guide. Teachers of classes in which grade levels are combined lack familiarity with the guide. This may impact instruction for the following year since it can be assumed that many of these teachers may not be well-informed regarding district expectations for the multiple grade levels for which they are responsible. It should also be noted that teachers who are assigned a combination of grades are usually those teachers who have multiple certifications and may teach other classes in addition to language arts. Ninety-one percent of the middle school language arts teachers expressed familiarity with the language arts curriculum abstracts.

The high school curriculum guide is published in the APS High School District Essentials and Guidelines, commonly referred to as the "yellow book." Seventy percent of the high school English teachers reported that they are familiar with the yellow book, but 30% reported either being unfamiliar with the yellow book or that they have never seen it. When asked if they were familiar with the APS course descriptions and district objectives for the subjects they teach, as found in the yellow book, 80% reported that they were familiar with their course descriptions, but 20% reported being unfamiliar with or not having seen the sections of the yellow book which describes courses they teach.

Eighty-six percent of the elementary teachers reported that they are familiar with the language arts content of the grades above and below their own. Teachers commented that they do not consider articulation to be a problem at the elementary level; however, they would like the opportunity for inservice among elementary grades that would encourage communication between teachers from other elementary schools and between elementary and middle school language arts teachers. Thirty-nine percent of the sixth grade language arts teachers reported being very familiar with the content of grades above or below the one they teach, as compared to 50% of the seventh grade teachers and 43% of the eighth grade teachers. These responses may suggest the need for articulation among grades, grade levels, and schools. Teachers expressed the need to know what other teachers at various levels are accomplishing, and what expectations other teachers have of their own programs, as well as the expectation of feeder school language arts teachers. Eighty-nine percent of the high school English teachers reported being familiar with the content of the language arts content of the grades above and below their own.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITIES

APS teachers were asked to indicate how frequently they used various activities to teach language arts. Creative writing is the most frequently used activity reported by both elementary and middle school language arts teachers. The activity most frequently reported high school teachers was expository writing (explanatory paragraphs and essays).

Activities to teaching writing mechanics were frequently used across grade levels by a majority of language arts teachers. Other activities frequently used by a majority of elementary teachers included listening activities, problem solving, and the use of study skills. In contrast, the scope of teaching activities narrowed at the secondary level, where the majority of middle school teachers reported study skills as the only other frequently incorporated activity. High school English teachers reported assigning frequent functional writing activities, such as writing reports, letters, and notes.

HOMEWORK

Homework plays an important role as an extension to instruction. Parents and students were asked several questions about homework. Overall, 94% of the parents reported that they feel comfortable helping their children with spelling, writing, grammar, and library assignments. Parents responded that they feel most comfortable helping their children select library books and least comfortable helping with spelling homework. Parents across all grade levels commented that they would like see more homework given to their children, especially in writing reports or compositions, and practicing spelling, punctuation, and handwriting.

Thirty-eight percent of the fourth grade students reported that they most frequently were assigned spelling homework, and one-third of the secondary students reported frequent homework in reading and writing assignments.

TEACHING MATERIALS

Language Arts teachers were asked to indicate how frequently various types of teaching materials were used. The following table includes the materials that teachers most often reported using on a frequent basis. As the data reveal, the textbook was the most frequently used teaching material at the secondary level. Textbooks and supplementary books were used on an equally frequent basis at the elementary level.

PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS REPORTING FREQUENT USE OF LANGUAGE ARTS MATERIALS

	Elementary	Middle	High
Textbooks	68%	84%	77%
Teacher-Made Materials	70	37	51
Supplementary Books	68	38	34
Handouts/Worksheets	48	47	36

Although teachers across all grade levels reported that they would prefer to assign more student-generated writing assignments, elementary teachers reported an increasing use of student writing such as squiggle books and other forms of creative writing. At the middle school level, teachers reported that handouts and worksheets were used to supplement the textbook, and in some cases were used instead of textbooks when appropriate books were not available for a specific lesson. Middle and high school teachers noted that handouts and worksheets were generally unnecessary in teaching language arts since the main focus of the secondary language arts curriculum was on student-generated writing. Workbooks were used at the secondary level most often in developmental classes. Use of supplementary books were believed to be critical to the secondary language arts curriculum. Middle and high school teachers reported that additional funding would be helpful in replacing worn paperbacks and in increasing their present collections.

Computers were used infrequently by the language arts teachers across all grade levels, due in large part to the inaccessibility of equipment. Although all schools have computers, teachers reported that they were not able to schedule their classes for enough quality time to review word processing programs and to actually work on the computers. Lack of access to computers prevented teachers and students from having enough computer experience to use computers effectively as teaching or learning tools.

LANGUAGE ARTS TEXTBOOKS

The textbooks used in language arts represent the full spectrum of the language process skills since they deal with reading, writing, speaking, and listening. All language arts textbooks were selected by teacher committees during the last textbook adoption. As the table below demonstrates, language arts teachers across all grade levels depend on textbooks, especially for language and grammar instruction. At the secondary level, middle and high school teachers reported most frequent use of literature textbooks or anthologies. Middle school teachers relied on spelling textbooks to a greater extent than did elementary teachers. It should be noted that 52% of the elementary teachers reported that their schools had not purchased literature kits or handwriting textbooks.

PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS REPORTING FREQUENT USE OF LANGUAGE ARTS TEXTBOOKS BY LEVEL

	Elementary	Middle	High
Language/Grammar	64%	90%	80%
Literature	33	82	92
Spelling	76	95	*
Handwriting	26	*	*
Writing/Composition	*	*	62

* textbooks not adopted

STUDENT OPINION SURVEY RESULTS

Student Opinion Surveys were developed to measure student attitudes and behaviors pertaining to their study of language arts. The surveys were not intended to be inclusive of all areas of language arts, but rather focus on students' attitude toward writing, the frequency of written reports and essays, teachers' encouragement of the writing process, teachers' feedback on student writing, and the frequency and types of homework related to language arts. Several of the survey items were adopted from the 1978-79 Third Assessment of Writing and the 1970-71 Reading and Literature Assessment developed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Two forms of the Student Opinion Surveys were developed to elicit the opinions of students at the elementary and secondary levels, and were administered in May, 1987. Since NAEP responses represent a nation-wide sample, they are presented in this report as a standard by which we can interpret the responses of APS students.

METHODOLOGY

At the elementary level, the Student Opinion Survey was administered to one fourth grade class from each elementary school. The secondary level sample included eighth and eleventh grade students from one language arts class at each middle and high school in APS. The samples were selected randomly and represent a confidence level of 95% for the populations included in the evaluation design. Survey results were compiled for 3,031 students, including 1,823 fifth grade students, 437 eighth grade students, and 243 eleventh grade students. Comparisons of all groups with the NAEP national sample are analyzed in this report.

Classroom sets of the opinion surveys included survey booklets and computer-scorable answer sheets. Teachers were instructed to read the entire survey aloud with their students before students worked on it independently. The average total administration time for each survey, including instructions and background questions, was about 35 minutes.

SURVEY RESULTS

Attitudes Toward Writing - The goals of the APS language arts program are in part to "enrich and expand students' lives by helping them discover the pleasures of being writers." The data presented in the following table summarize students' responses to statements designed to assess their attitudes toward writing. Overall, students from both the APS and NAEP national sample demonstrated positive attitudes toward writing, although they did not demonstrate overwhelming confidence in the quality of their writing.

ATTITUDES TOWARD WRITING

Percentage of Students from Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Samples Reporting the Statements True

I enjoy writing. (Grade 4)

APS ********** 66%

NAEP ********** 71%

I look forward to writing down my ideas. (Grade 4)

APS ********** 55%

NAEP ********** 55%

I feel confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas in writing. (Grade 4)

APS ********** 57%

NAEP ********** 57%

People seem to enjoy what I write. (Grade 4)

APS ********** 43%

NAEP ********** 45%

I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be graded. (Grade 4)

APS ********** 41%

NAEP ******** 24%

Do you enjoy working on written assignments? (Grades 8 and 11)

APS (8) ********** 68%

NAEP (8) ********** 74%

APS (11) ********** 75%

NAEP (11) ********** 76%

How Frequently Students Write in School

To obtain a general measure of how much writing students do for school, students were asked how many reports and essays they had written in the last nine week period for any school subject. The results in the following table demonstrate that the majority of APS eighth and eleventh grade students reported writing at least three reports or essays during the last nine week period, as compared to at least two essays written during the same time frame by secondary students from the national sample.

A recent study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1986) revealed that in grades 8 and 11, students who reported doing some writing in school had higher writing achievement that those who reported doing no writing. The most dramatic difference in writing achievement appeared between students who reported no writing and those who reported having written three or four essays or reports in the previous nine weeks. As the number of essays or reports written increased, so did writing achievement, up to about four essays, where achievement leveled off or declined with increased number of written assignments.

NUMBER OF REPORTS AND ESSAYS WRITTEN

Percentage of Students from Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Samples

	Number of Essays and Reports		
	None	1-2	3-4
APS			
Grade 8	0	9%	43%
Grade 11	0	3	34
NAEP			
Grade 8	12%	26%	21%
Grade 11	9	28	27

Teachers' Encouragement of the Writing Process

During the past decade language arts teachers have shifted the emphasis in writing instruction away from reacting to and reworking the finished product toward focusing on the process students engage in as they write. (Beeker, 1981) The following table displays the students' responses to questions about process-oriented activities. The responses indicate that a growing proportion of students were asked to perform one or another type of process-oriented writing activity. The percentages, however, indicate that instruction encouraging the writing process is not routine. For most assignments, the majority of students were not asked to engage in process-oriented writing activities.

TEACHERS' ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE WRITING PROCESS

Percentage of Students from Albuquerque Public School (APS) and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Samples Reporting Usually Being Asked to Use Process-Oriented Activities

Make notes before you write

	APS		NAEP
Grade 4	34%	Grade 4	24%
Grade 8	44	Grade 8	42
Grade 11	60	Grade 11	56

Make an outline

	APS		NAEP
Grade 4	26%	Grade 4	20%
Grade 8	38	Grade 8	27
Grade 11	39	Grade 11	48

Talk to teacher while writing paper

	APS		NAEP
Grade 4	43%	Grade 4	27%
Grade 8	47	Grade 8	29
Grade 11	37	Grade 11	42

Rewrite before paper is graded

	APS		NAEP
Grade 4	35%	Grade 4	26%
Grade 8	55	Grade 8	45
Grade 11	53	Grade 11	57

Rewrite after paper is graded

	APS		NAEP
Grade 4	21%	Grade 4	22%
Grade 8	9	Grade 8	14
Grade 11	5	Grade 11	14

Incorporating some of these activities into the school assignments does not necessarily mean that they will be related to writing achievement. The National Assessment of Educational Progress reports that at grade 4, students reporting a greater use of process activities performed less well than classmates who reported less exposure to

such activities. At grade 8, students reporting moderate utilization of process activities did better than those receiving lower or higher exposure to such instruction. Only at grade 11 does there seem to be some positive relationship between higher achievement in writing and the teachers' focus on process-related instructional activities.

These findings may suggest that process approaches have been cursory rather than unsuccessful. Simply providing students with exposure to process activities may not be enough to ensure that students learn how to use these skills effectively. Students may need more instruction in when and how to use such approaches in their own writing and more practice in actual writing situations.

Teachers' Feedback on Student Writing

Students were asked to relate the kinds of feedback they receive from their teachers. Results for the two questions are summarized in the following table. The teachers' use of written notes on student papers increases dramatically across the grade levels. APS middle and high school students reported usually receiving more written suggestions on how to improve their writing than did their counterparts on the national sample. Less than one-third of the students from either the APS sample or the national sample reported usually discussing their papers with their teachers.

TEACHERS' FEEDBACK ON STUDENT WRITING

Percentage of Students from Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Samples Reporting Teachers Usually Providing Type of Feedback

Written suggestions for improvement

	APS		NAEP
Grade 4	32%	Grade 4	31%
Grade 8	51	Grade 8	38
Grade 11	60	Grade 11	48

Discussion with teacher

	APS		NAEP
Grade 4	28%	Grade 4	*
Grade 8	22	Grade 8	31
Grade 11	33	Grade 11	27

* data not available

Homework

The following items dealing with writing were created by APS personnel assigned to the evaluation and, thus, no comparisons can be made with a national sample. Today's curriculum covers so many subjects that some homework is necessary in order to guarantee that enough learning time is devoted to each area. APS students were asked how often they are assigned homework in various language arts areas. The data reveal that the majority of APS students had homework in spelling, writing, and vocabulary at least once a week.

HOMEWORK

Percentage of Students from Albuquerque Public Schools Reporting the Frequency of Types of Homework Assignments

	Every Night	2-4 Times a Week	Once a a Week	Never
SPELLING				
Grade 4	9%	38%	36%	15%
Grade 8	6	23	55	17
Grade 11	2	8	34	56
WRITING				
Grade 4	9%	22%	36%	30%
Grade 8	13	33	42	11
Grade 11	3	30	46	21
VOCABULARY				
Grade 4	3%	14%	34%	48%
Grade 8	4	13	55	28
Grade 11	10	12	50	26

Until recently, research on the effects of homework yielded inconclusive findings. But new studies reveal that homework improves achievement when measured by standardized tests or by school grades. (Strother, 1984) Even when the amount of homework that students report is measured in a very general way as it was in our student survey, with no control for the quality of the homework assignment, homework seems to have beneficial effects on achievement. A recent research study concluded that "increased work time results in higher achievement, as measured by grades, for all levels of ability. Homework also seems to have compensatory effects; students of lower ability can achieve grades commensurate with their brighter peers through increased study." (Keith, 1979) Researchers caution, however, that homework must be properly organized, students must understand why they should complete the homework, and students must receive quick feedback on their efforts. (Fiske, 1983)

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN LANGUAGE ARTS

Two assessments of student achievement in language arts were reviewed for purposes of this evaluation: The Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills, and the New Mexico High School Proficiency Examination. Longitudinal data are presented for both tests. Although each year's data represents a different group of students, trends over several years' time can be viewed as a general indication of program effectiveness.

The New Mexico State Department of Education requires that the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) be administered to third, fifth, and eighth grade students. In the area of language arts, the CTBS measures student achievement in language mechanics, language expression, spelling, and reference skills. It is important to note that the CTBS is not intended to be a direct measure of the APS curriculum but rather serves to provide a sampling of the major content areas. No standardized norm-referenced test is prepared to measure what is taught in any specific school district because such tests are developed to test areas common to a large variety of curricula nationwide. (O'Neal, 1987) In a comparison of CTBS test objectives and the APS curriculum abstracts objectives (Bonin, 1983), it was determined that the CTBS includes 35% of the APS language arts objectives at the third grade, and 40% of the APS language arts objectives at the fifth grade level.

CTBS language arts subtest data from 1985, 1986, and 1987 for Albuquerque Public Schools' students are presented in this report. Detailed APS reports of CTBS results are available at each school site.

The State Department of Education also requires that tenth grade students take the New Mexico High School Proficiency Examination (NMHSPE). The NMHSPE is composed of two parts: the Writing Skills Appraisal which has been administered in the fall of a students' tenth grade year and the objective test which has been given in the spring. Students were required to pass both sections of the exam in order to receive a diploma endorsement in the form of a gold seal, and a transcript endorsement. These data are used as an indicator of the effectiveness of the language arts program in addressing basic literacy skills in its curriculum. This report focuses on the 1984-85 and 1985-86 Writing Skills Appraisals.

The Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills and the New Mexico High School Proficiency Examination results are among many indicators of program effectiveness used by principals, curriculum coordinators, counselors, teachers, parents, and students for the overall improvement of instruction. Test scores can show areas in which instruction seems to help students and areas where adjustments in the curriculum may improve the student's opportunity to learn.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE TESTS OF BASIC SKILLS

The CTBS, Form U test battery measures some basic skills in language arts by dividing the content area into several major subtests: Language Mechanics, Language Expression, Spelling, and Reference Skills. Average percentile scores compare the performance of APS students to that of the national normative group. In considering the results presented in this report, it is important to note that for an individual taking these tests the range of average performance is from the 40th to the 60th percentiles.

Language Mechanics - This test measures punctuation and capitalization skills. Application of these skills are assessed by having students identify correct usage as presented in discrete sentences or passages.

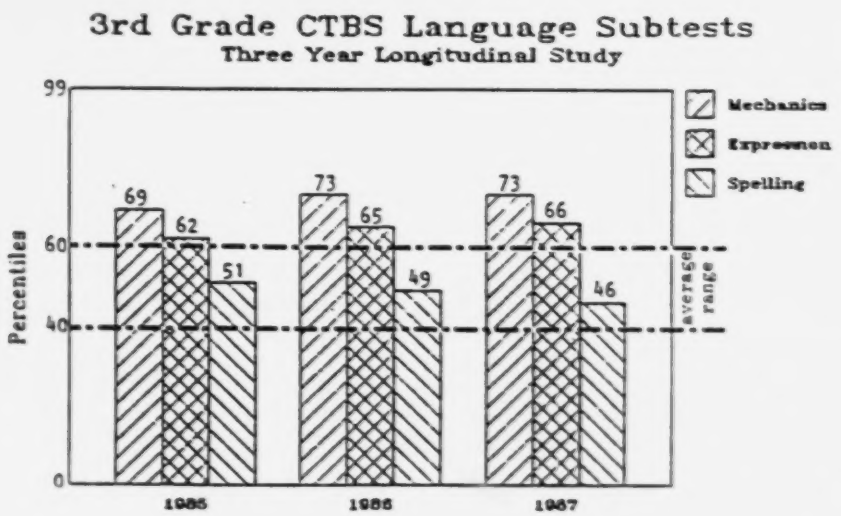
Language Expression - The Language Expression test contains items that measure the student's use of skills in language usage and sentence structure. The items are designed to assess the use of various parts of speech, formation and organization of sentences and paragraphs, writing for clarity, and the appropriate use of various writing styles. All items are based on rules of standard written English.

Spelling - Items on the Spelling test measure applications of spelling rules for consonants, vowels, and various structural forms. Material is presented in the context of sentences with a missing word. The student identifies the correct spelling of a word that would complete the sentence. The rationale for this item format is threefold: (1) Spelling words are taught in a meaningful context; (2) Recognition of a spelling error is a skill that a student would apply to proofreading his own written material; (3) Homonyms and other easily confused words represent important content in a spelling program, but can be tested only in the context of a sentence. The misspellings in this test are common among students. The words included in each level of the spelling test were carefully selected to represent spelling rules widely taught at each level.

Reference Skills (not included on grade 3 test) - The Reference Skills test assesses the student's knowledge of how to find and use reference materials and to follow library procedures. Item content is related to parts of books, dictionary use, library skills and consumer skills. This test assumes that the student has had a library available and has received instruction in its use.

THIRD GRADE CTBS RESULTS

The following graph demonstrates that APS third grade students scored above average in Language Expression and Language Mechanics subtests. Language Expression scores show consistent improvements over the previous three years and Language Mechanics scores have remained constant for the past two years. Although Spelling scores were within the normal percentile range, they represent the weakest performances for students at the third grade level.



In a recent document regarding the status of the teaching of spelling in APS, the Spelling Report (Foster, 1987), it was pointed out that the APS Elementary Language Arts Curriculum Guide promotes the theory that children from kindergarten through the third grade should be encouraged to attempt to write using invented spelling. The objective is to allow spelling development to occur naturally, and at the same time maintain the student's interest and confidence in his or her ability to communicate in writing. While the goal is to produce students proficient in the process of writing, the use of invented spelling may hamper the student's ability to select correctly spelled words within the context of sentences, as is required on the CTBS. The teacher editions of the adopted spelling series offer suggested activities to help orient students to the way that spelling is tested on the CTBS.

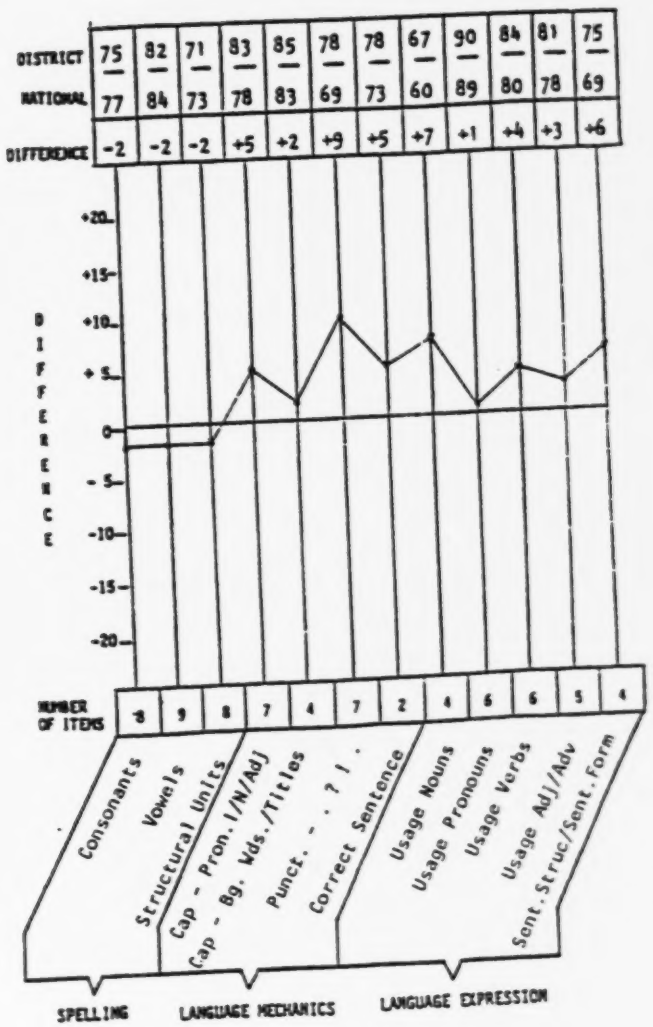
A study cited in the APS Elementary Language Arts Curriculum Guide revealed that approximately 27% of all spelling errors can be attributed to poor handwriting. (Coody, 1982) This is especially critical information because in the middle of the third grade, around the time that the CTBS is administered, third grade students begin to transfer from manuscript to cursive writing. A study (Scibior, 1985) cited in the Spelling Report documented similar findings:

> There were some fluctuations in the percentage of conventional spelling. One particularly noticeable fluctuation occurred during the period when the children were shifting from printing to cursive writing. Words which had been spelled conventionally by some of the children earlier in the year were being written incorrectly when the children were trying cursive writing; letters were unintentionally left out, some letters were positioned in the word incorrectly. At this time the children seemed to be contending with the uncertainties of controlling their pencils, which interfered to some extent with their knowledge of spelling.

The APS language arts program promotes the use of the D'Nealian (Scott-Foresman) handwriting textbook which was one of two spelling textbooks adopted in 1982. The purpose for promoting this program is to bring a consistent approach to early childhood spelling and writing. The D'Nealian handwriting program makes the transfer from manuscript printing to cursive writing in the middle of the second grade, allowing students to become confident with cursive writing and spelling for one year before they take the CTBS. APS language arts program personnel has provided inservice for principals and teachers in an effort to encourage the use of the D'Nealian handwriting program.

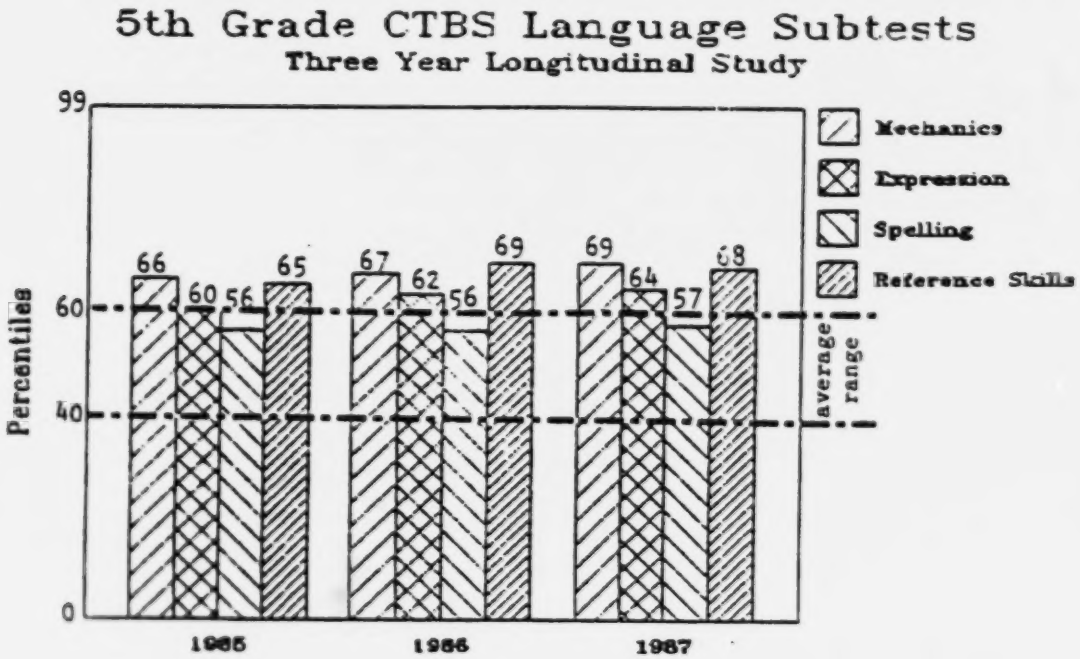
The following graph shows the language subtest portion of the Skills Analysis included in the 1986 CTBS District Report published by Planning, Research and Accountability (PRA). The graph presents the language skill areas measured by the CTBS at the third grade level. This graph shows the average percentage-correct results for APS third graders compared to that of the national norm group. APS third grade students scored higher than the norm group in all Language Mechanics and Language Expression skills. On all three skill areas included on the Spelling subtest, however, APS students scored lower than the national norm group. For specific information on item formats, teachers can refer to sample item documents and to the detailed CTBS school reports provided by PRA for every school.

Grade 3
CTBS LANGUAGE SKILLS ANALYSIS
SPRING, 1987



FIFTH GRADE CTBS RESULTS

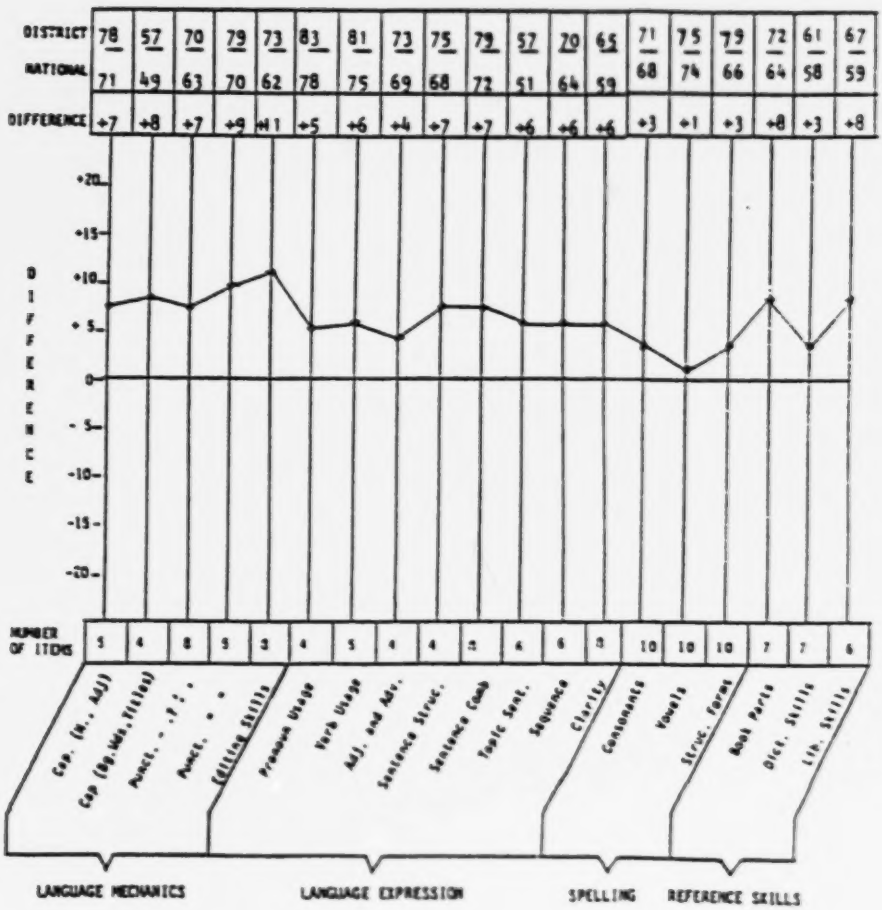
The graph presented below illustrates that APS fifth grade students have consistently scored at or above the average percentile range in Language Mechanics, Language Expression and Reference Skills over the past three years. Fifth grade performance on the Spelling subtest falls within the normal percentile range; however, spelling represents the weakest performance of fifth grade students. Spelling textbooks adopted in 1982 present lessons organized in units of approximately six to eight weeks. The lessons presented in each unit are comprised of lists of words. Unit tests are also included in the teachers' editions that utilize a format similar to that of the CTBS, whereby students identify the correct spelling of a word within the context of a sentence from a choice of several other either misspelled words or homonyms inappropriate for the sentence presented.



Although spelling is considered to be a basic skill, its complexity should not be underestimated. Spelling requires visual and auditory memory skills in addition to knowledge of spelling rules and the application of exceptions to the rules. There is considerable disparity of opinion concerning the value of spelling rules. (Boyd, 1970) Some educators indicate that spelling rules apply to a comparatively small number of words, and a rule should cover a sufficient number of words to pay for the effort of learning. Other educators have insisted upon the retention of rules, believing that they result in the improvement of spelling ability, that they have greater value in the intermediate grades, and that they are useful as a remedial technique. Spellings in the English language are arbitrary and all too often illogical from a child's point of view. Probably one of the reasons it is difficult to motivate some children to work on spelling is that its arbitrariness is to them incomprehensible. (Strickland, 1969)

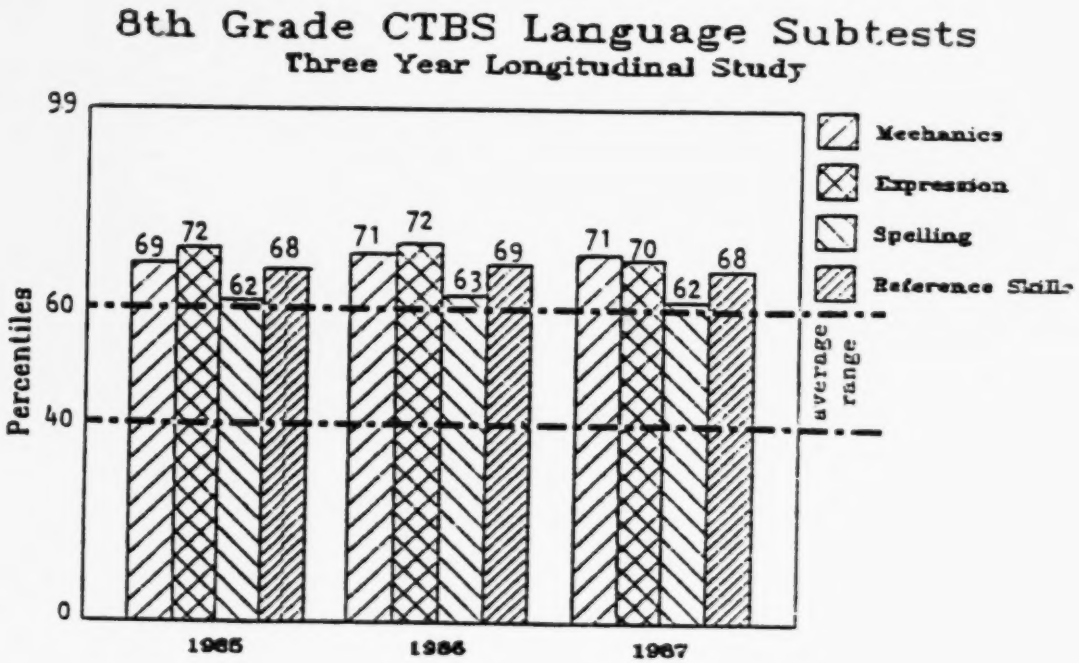
The following graph presents the language skill areas measured by the CTBS at the fifth grade level. This graph compares the average percent of items that APS fifth grade students scored correctly with the average percent of items scored correctly by the national sample. The data demonstrate that APS students scored higher on all language skills than did the national norm group.

GRADE 5
CTBS LANGUAGE SKILLS ANALYSIS
Spring, 1987



EIGHTH GRADE CTBS RESULTS

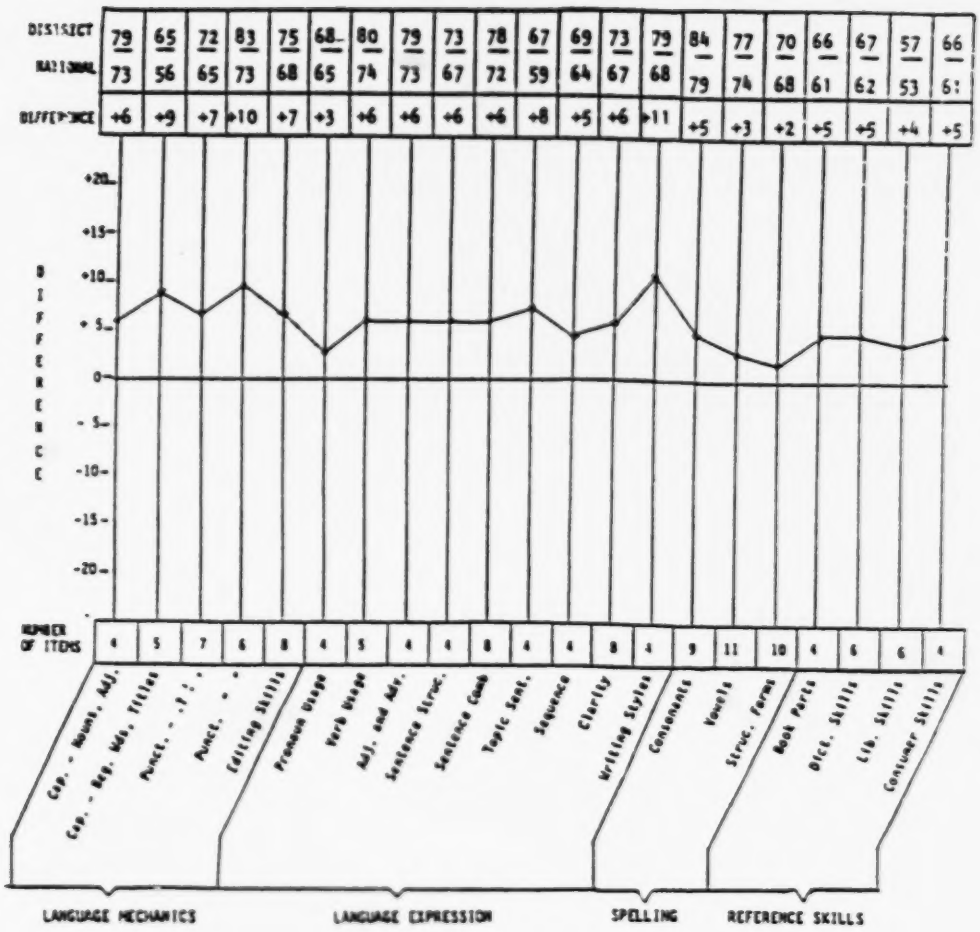
The graph below demonstrates that APS eighth grade students have continually scored above the average range in all language subtests of the CTBS over the past three years. The data also reveal that scores on the Language Expression subtest declined by three percentile points since 1986. As was the case with both the third and fifth grades, the Spelling subtest represents the weakest performance of eighth grade students.



The following graph presents the language skill areas measured by the CTBS at the eighth grade level. This graph shows that the average percentage-correct scores for APS eighth grade students were higher in all language skills than the national norm group. Eighth grade students' highest mastery, when compared to the national norm group, was demonstrated in writing styles skills (Language Expression) where APS students scored 11% more items correct than did the national norm group. Writing styles items require the student to identify a group of sentences that would be most appropriate for specialized types of writing such as letters requesting services, factual reports, and thank you letters.

The APS Curriculum Guide includes the study of proper form for letter and report writing and is introduced to middle school students in the sixth grade. Instruction on writing reports is expanded in the seventh and eighth grades to include organization of information and library research.

GRADE 8
CTBS LANGUAGE SKILLS ANALYSIS
Spring, 1987



NEW MEXICO HIGH SCHOOL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION

The New Mexico High School Proficiency Examination (NMHSPE) was designed to assess the extent to which New Mexico students have mastered the basic skills and knowledge specified in the New Mexico Basic Skills Plan. The NMHSPE includes the Writing Skills Appraisal and an objective test. The NMHSPE is part of the state-mandated assessment required by the New Mexico State Department of Education, which provides the tasks and guidelines regarding administration and scoring. The writing appraisal results are the focus of this section of the report as one assessment of the development of writing skills.

A committee of middle and high school language arts teachers, trained in holistic scoring procedures, scored all student work. The assumption underlying holistic scoring is that a composition is viewed as a whole in order to judge its quality, rather than being judged solely by aspects of its mechanics, rhetorical structure, syntactic patterns, or penmanship, although all of these elements are considered in judging the overall quality of the writing.

The members of the NMHSPE grading committee met initially to judge a series of 40 sample papers (10 for each of the four possible tasks), and to discuss and agree on the standards for scoring. Once these standards were set by the scoring committee, each member compared the papers to be graded according to this standard.

Papers were scored using a scale of 0 to 4. Papers that received a "0" were those that had not been attempted. A score of "1" was a failing paper. These papers were poorly written and the reader would have had difficulty in grasping the meaning. Any paper that received a score of "1" was read and scored by a second committee member. A score of "2" indicated that the content of the paper was acceptable; however, details that would provide the reader with total understanding had been omitted. The content of a "3" paper was complete, sufficiently detailed, and included all necessary information. Papers that received "4" were superior and could be easily understood.

The student either passed or failed the writing appraisal. To pass the appraisal, the student was required to pass all three tasks. To pass a writing task, the student had to score a "2", "3", or "4". Failure on any of the three tasks meant that the student failed the Writing Skills Appraisal portion of the NMHSPE. Students who fail one or more tasks are allowed to retake the writing appraisal in subsequent years, but need only re-write those task(s) they previously failed.

The 1985-86 NMHSPE Writing Skills Appraisal consisted of the following three tasks:

1. classified advertisement OR job application
2. business letter
3. multi-paragraph composition

English departments at each of the APS high schools were allowed to select one of the two tasks for Task 1, a classified advertisement or job application, for students to write. Task 1 tested the student's ability to follow all directions clearly and accurately. All of the students wrote Task 2 and Task 3. Task 2, the business letter, required students to use proper letter form and to write at least one complete

paragraph in the body of the letter. The task tested the student's ability to use an identifiable means of development such as chronological order and order of importance. Students were informed of the topics that they could write about in Task 3 several days in advance of writing the composition. Task three required students to use the elements associated with paragraph instruction, including a topic sentence, supporting details, and a concluding sentence.

Since the Writing Appraisal was administered in October of the student's tenth grade, the ninth grade curriculum was designed to prepare students to successfully complete the test. The course objectives included practicing skills and writing forms typically included in the Writing Appraisal.

The following table demonstrates the number and percent of tenth grade students that passed and failed the Writing Skills Appraisal for the past two years. The data indicate that the writing appraisal was administered to 430 more students during the 1985-86 school year than in the previous year, and that district-wide a high percentage of tenth grade students passed over the past two years.

WRITING SKILLS APPRAISAL
Two Year Longitudinal Report
of Tenth Grade Students Passing and Failing

	1984-85		1985-86	
Passing	4631	94%	5076	95%
Failing	310	6	295	5
TOTAL	4941		5371	

During the 1985-86 school year, 6,505 tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students completed all three required tasks on the NMHSPE. The majority of students completing the writing appraisal were tenth grade students (83%), as compared to 10% eleventh grade students and 7% twelfth grade students. Although the NMHSPE exam was designed for tenth grade students, upperclassmen who participate in the exam (1) were transfer students from out-of-state, (2) had failed one or more sections of the writing appraisal as tenth graders, (3) had failed to complete all the tasks in previous testings, or (4) had been absent during the examination period. An analysis of the scores earned for each of the three tasks earned, for all students participating in the Writing Skills Appraisal, is displayed in the following table.

WRITING ASSESSMENT TASKS
Scores Earned

TASK	Score 0 n	0 %	1 n	1 %	2 n	2 %	3 n	3 %	4 n	4 %	Total
1. Job Application/ Classified Ad	129	2%	59	1%	873	13%	2374	34%	3558	51%	6993
2. Business Letter	229	3%	143	2%	1730	25%	3135	45%	1756	25%	6993
3. Composition	326	5%	349	5%	2471	35%	3119	45%	730	10%	6995

Score: 0 = Not Attempted
1 = Failed
2/3 = Satisfactory/Passed
4 = Superior/Passed

The data reveal that students earned higher scores (3-4) on the first writing tasks (either the job application or the classified ad) than on the second (business letter) writing task and the third (composition) writing task. The writing task with the highest percentage (5%) of failing scores, was the third task, the composition.

It should be noted that the State Department of Education requires that each district provide remediation to those students who do not successfully complete the NMHSPE objective test or writing assessment and to those who do not pass the exam at the tenth or eleventh grades. APS high school students who have failed the NMHSPE are counseled to enroll in elective composition classes which are designed to prepare students for the successful completion of the exam.

Note: As of the 1987-88 school year, sophomores will be required to pass both components of a new test, the New Mexico High School Competency Examination, in order to graduate. In addition, the State Department of Education will be responsible for scoring both the objective section and the writing appraisal of the exam.

HIGH SCHOOL DRAMA PROGRAM

In April 1987, the New Mexico Commission on Higher Education and the New Mexico Department of Education identified academic competencies in five areas: language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and fine arts. The report states, "College entrants will also profit from more intensive preparation in at least one of the four areas of the arts: visual arts, theatre, music, and dance."

The drama program in the Albuquerque Public Schools is an elective program offering credit in fine arts. Some stagecraft courses may offer practical arts credit. Every high school in APS has an established drama program and a theater or performing arts center. Course offerings include Drama I, II, and III; Stagecraft I, II, III, and IV; Theater Production, and Advanced Theater Production. Course offerings are based upon New Mexico Drama/Theater Competencies for Grades 3, 5, 8, and School Exit Level published by the State Department of Education. Students may take any of the offerings for one or two semesters with the exception of Stagecraft IV and Advanced Theater Production. Drama courses are never tracked; students are always grouped heterogeneously. Each high school has a certified drama instructor.

High school drama activities include an all-city one-act drama festival. Representatives from regional colleges and universities visit the festival. Approximately 20 scholarships are awarded each year as a result of this activity. APS high schools also participate in the festivals at the University of New Mexico and at Eastern New Mexico University where their performances are critiqued and where college personnel present theater workshops. The APS high school theater production schedule offers approximately 75 works throughout the school year. In cooperation with the high school English departments, drama directors produce a show each year related to literature studied in English classes.

The middle school drama program is combined with speech. Thirteen of the 23 middle schools offer elective courses in speech and drama. Three schools have an after-school drama club. Activities include four meets each year; one speech and one drama meet per semester. These activities are held on Saturdays at a middle school. Transported by parents, an average of 300 students participate on each of these occasions. Middle school events are judged, but not ranked. In keeping with the middle school philosophy, participation is rewarded, students are encouraged, and self-esteem is promoted. Middle school speech and drama teachers may be certified in either of these areas and teach other subjects for most of the school day. Students may be from grades 6, 7, or 8 and are grouped heterogeneously. The APS middle school speech and drama program serves approximately 900 students per semester.

Although APS has no provision for an elementary drama program, an elementary drama program exists due to the creative efforts of some elementary classroom teachers. Some drama competencies are included in the speaking skills listed in the language arts competencies. Elementary drama has no resources such as itinerant art or music teachers. The activities provided are school programs and classroom productions.

The following discussion regarding the high school drama program incorporates the responses of high school drama teachers, students enrolled in intermediate drama courses, and their parents. The drama teachers indicated that they teach several levels of drama during the course of the school day, including Beginning and Advanced Drama, Stagecraft, and Theater Production. Enrollment data revealed that 1,194 students were enrolled in drama classes during the 1986-87 school year.

The drama program uses the objectives stated in the New Mexico Drama/Theater Competencies as the goals of the program. The following table demonstrates that the majority of teachers were in agreement that their programs effectively accomplish the New Mexico drama/theater competencies.

HIGH SCHOOL DRAMA TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE NEW MEXICO DRAMA/THEATER COMPETENCIES

The student shall ...	
be a part of a performing group in the production of a play.	100%
understand and participate in the technical aspects of the production of a play.	90
respond to drama/theater as an audience member and make quality judgments.	80
understand the vocational and avocational possibilities in drama/theater.	80
improvise and create drama/theater.	80
acquire a background in dramatic literature.	60
develop historical perspectives of theater.	60
understand the dramatic possibilities of any piece of dramatic literature.	50

Drama teachers perceived the success of the program was that students participate in the various aspects of performing and producing plays and in doing so learn to appreciate the theater. Teachers noted that limited class time impedes teachers from presenting material on the background of dramatic literature, historical perspectives, or possibilities of dramatic literature.

Whereas 41% of the students reported that their schools generally have positive attitudes toward the drama program, 44% described their schools as being unconcerned about the program. Fifty-one percent of the students reported that they have been given assignments in English classes based on seeing a play produced at their school, and the majority (53%) of the students agreed that seeing a play that was assigned by their English teachers added to their understanding of the literature they were studying.

Parents of high school students enrolled in advanced drama classes acknowledged that their children benefitted from participation in drama, especially in that students learned to work with groups, and developed confidence and self-discipline through a variety of experiences. Parents also responded that their students learned to improve their memory skills. Most of the students agreed that the most important aspects of drama to them are in developing confidence and memory skills. The least important aspects of drama noted by the students were in learning business and management skills. Parents and students also agreed that involvement in drama productions positively affects school performance and motivates students to go to school and stay in school.

Parents were asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the drama program at their schools. Parents rated drama teachers as the primary strength of the program, most often remarking that their drama teachers are talented and dedicated. Although there was not a consensus by parents in identifying major weaknesses of the program, parents mentioned a shortage of males for roles and the need to attract more boys to the drama program; excessive dependence on fund-raising; and lack of involvement from other faculty, especially in attending performances.

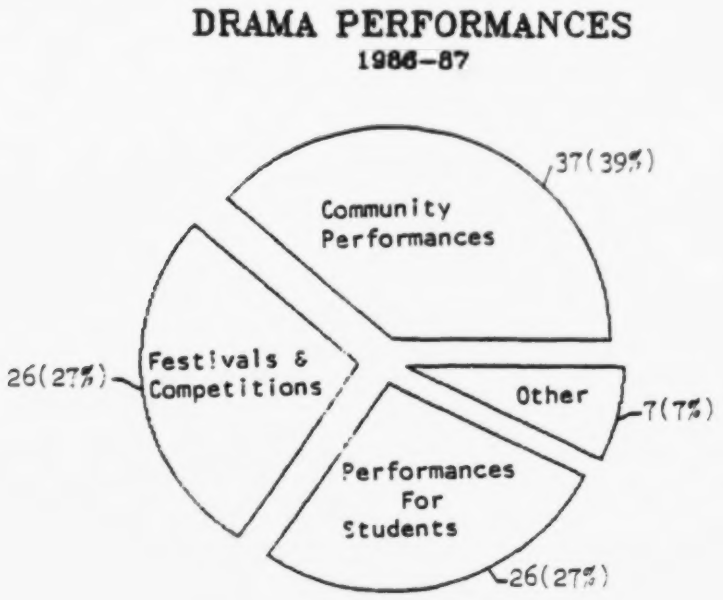
Sixty-one percent of the students indicated that they would like to enroll in more drama classes while in high school. The majority of students (92%) revealed that attending theater productions would remain a life-long interest to them.

CONTENT AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

Drama teachers reported that the most frequent content of drama/theater classes included comedy, ensemble acting, theater history, pantomime, improvisation, duo drama, classical theater, and directing. Stagecraft content included set design, scenery and props, makeup-costuming, and lighting. The teaching strategy most often reported by drama teachers was after school rehearsals. Although students devoted a great deal of time rehearsing after school, parents indicated that they did not think the time students spent in after school rehearsal was excessive. Teachers also stated that frequently utilized teaching strategies included in-class rehearsals, performing tests, lectures, and assigned reading. Teachers noted that while they would like to incorporate video taping as an important teaching strategy, lack of access to the necessary equipment prevented them from doing so. Drama teachers noted that it was oftentimes difficult to check out school video taping equipment since school equipment is for use by the entire faculty. Teachers requested that video taping equipment be purchased by the Curriculum Center and housed with the Language Arts Coordinator for use by drama teachers. Teachers commented that training in the use of video equipment would be an appropriate use of inservice time.

DRAMA PERFORMANCES

Theatrical performances are central to a student's drama experience. Performances were the means by which teachers and students demonstrated the results of their work. Drama teachers were asked to document performances for the 1986-87 school year. As the following graph demonstrates, community performances comprised the majority (39%) of performances. Such programs included parent programs and were held in the evenings and on weekends. In-school performances for students and festivals and competitions accounted for 27% of the performances reported by drama teachers. The remaining activities included musical productions and tours.



Ninety-six percent of the parents responded that they attended school drama productions when their children were involved, as compared to 52% of the parents who attended drama productions even when their children were not involved. Most of the teachers noted that they require their students to attend live theatrical performances; however, 91% of the students reported that they attended drama productions even when they were not required to attend, and 77% responded that they have attended other schools' drama productions.

Drama programs depended on fund-raising projects to finance school productions. Sixty-two percent of the drama students reported that they have participated in fund raising activities to support their schools' drama program, as compared to 38% who have not participated in any fund raising activities. Thirty-nine percent of the students responded that their experience with fund raising for drama have been positive. Although the majority (69%) of parents conceded that fund raising was a necessary part of drama productions, several of the parents expressed their conviction that APS should provide more monetary support of the drama program.

EQUIPMENT PURCHASE AND REPAIR NEEDS

Ninety percent of the drama teachers reported that the drama facilities at their schools were satisfactory. However, 70% indicated that their minimum equipment purchase needs were not being met. The drama teachers commented that they would prefer to have funding allocated directly to the drama departments at each school, which would diminish their present dependence on ticket sales and fund-raising projects for the money necessary to purchase needed equipment. The drama teachers specifically cited the need for additional lighting and sound equipment.

The majority (90%) of drama teachers stated that the repair needs of the drama facilities at their schools were not being met. Teachers cited specific theater maintenance problems such as the cleaning and replacing of stage curtains and theater seats, care of the stage floors, and repair of lighting systems. Several drama teachers suggested that the APS Maintenance and Operations Department develop a maintenance schedule that would provide needed services to all theaters district-wide on a regular basis.

Drama teachers were asked to provide three suggestions for the improvement of the APS Drama Program. The need for departmental funding necessary for equipment purchase and repair was determined to be a high priority by the drama teachers. Drama teachers also expressed a strong need for added support from faculty and administration, especially during major productions. Drama teachers expressed the need for qualified drama teachers with expertise in acting, directing, scene design, and technical productions at each secondary school. It should be noted that state certification requirements for drama teachers will be eliminated by the change to licensure scheduled for January 1989.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The data demonstrated that the majority of elementary and secondary teachers were in agreement that their respective programs effectively accomplish the goals of the language arts program. However, teachers at both levels were in agreement that the goals need to be rewritten to define the relationship of reading and literature within the language arts curriculum. Teachers expressed the need for inservice related to creative and critical thinking activities and materials. Parents requested that there be more emphasis on writing skills throughout the language arts curriculum. The majority of parents commented that the high pupil/teacher ratio does not allow adequate time to grade what they consider to be a sufficient quantity of writing assignments. The New Mexico Educational Reform Act of 1986 include provisions which may alleviate the problem of overloading teachers and which should provide teachers with more time to work with students and to encourage more student writing. Elementary and secondary principals noted the need to teach students to use effective study strategies.

The evaluation results suggested the need for articulation among grades, levels, and schools. Teachers expressed the need to know what other teachers at various levels are accomplishing and what expectations other teachers have of their own programs, as well as the expectation of feeder school language arts teachers.

A three year longitudinal analysis of CTBS scores demonstrated a high level of achievement in language mechanics, language expression, and reference skills. The data also revealed that, while well within the normal range, the spelling subtest represented the weakest performance of students at the third, fifth, and eighth grade levels. A two year longitudinal study of the Writing Appraisal portion of the New Mexico High School Proficiency Examination demonstrated that 94-95% of tenth grade students successfully completed the test.

Student opinion surveys were administered at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The surveys revealed that students demonstrated positive attitudes toward writing, although they did not demonstrate overwhelming confidence in the quality of their writing. The majority of APS secondary students reported writing at least three reports or essays during the last nine week period, as compared to at least two essays written during the same time frame by secondary students from the national sample. Responses indicated that a growing proportion of students are being asked to perform various types of process-oriented writing activities; however, the data do not indicate that instruction encouraging the writing process is routine. APS middle and high school students report usually receiving more written suggestions on how to improve their writing than do their counterparts on the national sample. Less than one-third of students from either the APS sample or the national sample reported usually discussing their papers with their teachers. Survey data also revealed that the majority of APS students have homework in spelling, writing, and vocabulary at least once a week.

A review of the high school drama program demonstrated that the majority of drama teachers were in agreement that the program effectively accomplishes the competencies stated in the New Mexico Drama/Theater Competencies. Parents and their students enrolled in advanced drama courses acknowledged that students benefitted from participation in drama especially in developing confidence and self-discipline.

While nearly all the drama teachers reported that they were satisfied with their theater facilities, they also indicated that neither the repair needs of the drama facilities at their schools nor their minimum equipment purchase needs were being met. The drama teachers commented that they would prefer to have funding allocated directly to the drama departments at each school. In addition, several drama teachers suggested that the APS Maintenance and Operations Department develop a maintenance schedule that would provide needed services to all theaters district-wide on a regular basis.

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